

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSC-01 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02
SS-15 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01
USIA-06 /066 W
-----074334 121801Z /53

R 111202Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6776
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6776
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 1089

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, SU
SUBJECT: CABINET CHANGE

REF: KHARTOUM 427

SUMMARY: NOW THAT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN
CONCLUDED AND NEW SSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE NAMED, MAJOR
CABINET CHANGES ARE EXPECTED SOON. RUMORS ABOUND AND
THIS CABLE IS MEANT TO CONVEY FLAVOR OF THESE RUMORS.
SEVERAL PRESENT MEMBERS OF CABINET ARE EXPECTED TO BE
RELIEVED AND, IN GENERAL, CIVILIAN POLITICIANS INCLUDING
MANY RETURNEES, LED BY SADIQ AL-MAHDI, WILL TAKE OVER,
ALBEIT UNDER NIMEIRI'S CONTROL. KEY POSITIONS TO BE
FILLED WILL BE MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND MINISTER OF
FINANCE. MINDEF IS ILL AND FINANCE PORTFOLIO PRESENTLY
HELD BY NIMEIRI. MAKE-UP OF NEW CABINET WILL BE VIEWED
CLOSELY AS EVIDENCE OF NIMEIRI'S WILLINGNESS TURN-OVER
REAL POWER TO OTHERS AS CULMINATION RECONCILIATION
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CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY.

1. MAJOR CABINET CHANGES ARE WIDELY EXPECTED FOLLOWING
FIRST MEETING OF NEWLY ELECTED PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ON
MONDAY, MARCH 13. ACCORDING TO ONE WELL PLACED OFFICIAL,
NIMEIRI MAY WANT TO TURN GOVERNMENT OVER TO CIVILIAN
POLITICIANS. ALL FORMER MILITARY OFFICERS AND PERSONS

CONNECTED WITH NIMEIRI'S STEWARDSHIP WOULD BE REMOVED. SADIQ AL-MAHDI WOULD BE APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER AND WOULD SELECT HIS OWN CABINET WITH HELP OF NIMEIRI AND FIRST VICE PRESIDENT ABUL GASSIM MOHAMED HASHIM. CONSTITUTION OF THIS CABINET IS ALREADY SUSPECTED BY INSIDERS, AND INCLUDES SOME FOLLOWERS OF SADIQ AL-MAHDI. BY RETURNING GOVERNMENT TO PURELY CIVILIAN CONTROL, NIMEIRI EXPECTS TO AVOID PUBLIC CRITICISM OF HIS LEADERSHIP OR OF HIS APPOINTEES, MOSTLY EX-MILITARY. SHOULD NEW CABINET FALTER OR FAIL, MILITARY TAKEOVER PROCESS CAN BE REPEATED FOLLOWING MAJOR PURGE AND ARMY WOULD LOOK GOOD. CIVILIAN CABINET MIGHT ALSO BRING UNDERGROUND COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBERS OUT IN OPEN UNDER GUISE OF MOSLEM REVISIONISTS OR POLITICIANS, MAKING CONTROL OF COMMUNIST PARTY EASIER.

2. RUMORS ABOUND THAT SOME CABINET MINISTERS HAVE SHOWN AT LEAST WILLINGNESS TO RETIRE FROM PUBLIC SERVICE. MINISTER OF TRADE IS ILL; MINISTER PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION IS INEFFECTUAL; MINISTERS OF INDUSTRY AND OF TRANSPORT HAVE BEEN LONG IN HARNESS. FORMER MILITARY MEN WHO NOW HOLD LESS IMPORTANT PORTFOLIOS (YOUTH AND SPORTS; HEALTH) CAN BE PUT OUT TO PASTURE WITHOUT MAKING RIPPLES. MINDEFENSE GENERAL BASHIR MOHAMED ALI WHO IS ILL IS EXPECTED TO BE REPLACED BY GENERAL OMAR AL TAYYIB, PRESENT DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL SECURITY ORGANIZATION, AND CHIEF OF STAFF MOHAMMED OSMAN HASHIM TO BE RELIEVED. CONFIDENTIAL

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NEW MIN FINANCE POST HELD BY NIMEIRI MAY BE ECONOMIST FROM KHARTOUM UNIVERSITY. DEFENSE AND FINANCE POSITIONS ARE MOST IMPORTANT FROM USG POINT OF VIEW.

3. MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT ABUL GASSIM TO REMAIN AS FIRST VICE PRESIDENT. ABUL GASSIM'S ABILITY TO WORK WITH SADIQ AL-MAHDI AND OTHER RETURNEES MAY BE QUESTION MARK. ABUL GASSIM HAS NEVER LIKED RECONCILIATION ALTHOUGH HE HAS SUPPORTED IT IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN HIS POSITION AS HEIR APPARENT. RUMORS OF CORRUPTION OFTEN POINT TO ABUL GASSIM, WHO MIGHT FIND HIMSELF CONSPICUOUS SOUR APPLE IN CIVILIAN CABINET LIKELY TO BE REFORMIST. THUS IT UNLIKELY THAT ABUL GASSIM WOULD FAVOR RETURN OF OLD POLITICIANS IN ANY SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH.

4. SHARIF HUSSEIN AL-HINDI IS EXPECTED BACK IN SUDAN SOON AND MAY BE OFFERED CABINET POST. ONE SOURCE OF THIS RUMOR IS ABDEL MAGID ABU HASSABU, SUPPORTER OF HINDI WHO RETURNED TWO MONTHS AGO. HASSABU WAS AMONG THIRTY ASSEMBLYMEN APPOINTED DIRECTLY BY NIMEIRI ON MARCH 2 AND MAY GET CABINET POST HIMSELF. ANOTHER APPOINTEE TO NEW ASSEMBLY WAS AHMED ABDEL RAHMAN MOHAMMED, MOSLEM BROTHER, WHO ALSO IS RUMORED FOR

CABINET POSITION. PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE OF RELATIVE POLITICAL STRENGTH IN ASSEMBLY WOULD GIVE KHATMIYYA ABOUT 85 SEATS; THEY WOULD SUPPORT HINDI. MUSLIM BROTHERS HAVE THIRTY LOYAL SUPPORTERS IN ASSEMBLY AND SADIQ'S UMMA PARTY ELECTED 40 TO 45. CABINET MEMBERS NEED NOT BE APPOINTED FROM ASSEMBLY. HOWEVER, NIMEIRI MAY TRY TO DISTRIBUTE CABINET POSTS IN PROPORTION TO POLITICAL STRENGTH WHICH IS MOST EASILY MEASURED BY RESULTS OF ELECTION TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

5. COMMENT: SHOULD BE NOTED THAT FOREGOING IS STILL SPECULATIVE, ALTHOUGH MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN KHARTOUM EXPECT CHANGES ALONG LINES THIS REPORT. NIMEIRI HAS ALLOWED ERSTWHILE OPPOSITION MEMBERS TO GET KEY POSITIONS IN PARLIAMENT, SSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND IN SOUTHERN
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REGIONAL GOVERNMENT. STILL, KEY TEST OF POWER SHARING UNDER RECONCILIATION WILL BE NEW CABINET. HERE STAKES ARE BIGGER AND MORE POWER IS BEING DISTRIBUTED. ON OTHER HAND, NIMEIRI TOGETHER WITH ARMY, WILL CONTINUE HOLD REAL POWER IN SUDAN. THERE IS NO GAINSAYING, HOWEVER, THAT NIMEIRI HAS GONE FAR IN PAST YEAR TO AT LEAST LIBERALIZE DOMESTIC POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND EXPECTED CABINET RESHUFFLE WILL BE NEXT STEP IN THIS PROCESS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978KHARTO01089
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780110-1228
Format: TEL
From: KHARTOUM
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780379/aaaacorr.tel
Line Count: 145
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 4fc818c9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 KHARTOUM 427
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3361445
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CABINET CHANGE
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, SU
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4fc818c9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014